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AUTHOR Valadian, Margaret
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ABSTRACT

With specific reference to the Aboriginal situation in Australia, and in the context of the Australian federal government's current policy regarding Aboriginal self-management, this document addresses the need for alternatives to traditional Aboriginal training (education) programs and the implications of these alternative programs for the Aboriginal community. After establishing why alternative training programs are needed, and after drawing contrasts between traditional Aboriginal education and western schooling, problems associated with the change of federal government policy for Aborigines from assimilation to self-management are described. In conclusion, implications of the alternative training programs for Aboriginal self-help are listed. (Author/RH)

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INTEGRATED AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: PREPARATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Summary Theme C : Alternatives in Training and Implications for Self-Help

Ms Margaret Valadian
Director, Aboriginal
Training and Cultural Institute
and Ms Natascha McNamara

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1. This paper is developed with specific reference to the Aboriginal situation in Australia and in the context of current Federal Government policy of Aboriginal Self-Management. It addresses itself firstly to the need for alternatives in training and, secondly, to the implications of such training.

The Need for Alternative Training

2. The need for alternative training arises out of the policies and programmes of the past; the pressures of the present situation created by the need to "secure" the survival and the future of our people, and to meet the demands generated by these concerns. Over the last ten years, Aboriginal people have become increasingly aware of the need for alternatives in education and training. Throughout the country there is a growing network of Aboriginal-initiated schools and training programmes, all designed to provide an education system that is more closely attuned to community needs. These programmes are expressly designed to provide an alternative to the disanimating educational policies and programmes of the past as illustrated by a comparison of the traditional Aboriginal education system developed over 40,000 years ago and contemporary western schooling provided these past 200 years.

Traditional Aboriginal Education

3. In traditional Aboriginal society, education was a life-long process with the individual pursuing increasing levels of education throughout the course of his life. Education was a community concern and responsibility both in the training of the individual and in the collective education of the group. Traditional education, was integrated - formal and non-formal; and developed through a three-tiered system of learning. In traditional life, education was compulsory, prescribing as it did, patterns of life and behaviour to ensure the survival of the group. Traditional education was achievement-oriented prescribing the required levels of understanding of mythology and law for progress through the ceremonies and acceptance of membership of the

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group. Traditional education was goal oriented: to prepare the individual to take his place in the clan as a fully participating and contributing member of the society. This contrasts very markedly with the design and outcome of western education and administration which has been imposed on the Aboriginal community for the past 200 years.

Western Schooling

4. From the beginning of European colonization of Australia, western schooling has had a most devastating effect on Aboriginal society. Concentrating (as it has for 200 years) on the children, western schooling has caused severe disintegration of the Aboriginal community. It is contrary in every way to the methodology and the focus of traditional education. Western schooling has separated the Aboriginal child from his heritage, and his clan. It has, by and large, denied him the opportunity to participate in and contribute, in any substantial way, not only to his own society but also to the wider Australian society. The exclusion of Aboriginal adults from the schooling process has denied them the civic right and responsibility to prepare their young people to carry the mantle for the continuity for the clan. The schooling programmes and administrative policies of the past 200 years leaves the Aboriginal people of Australia totally unprepared for the challenges, pressures and demands of self-help and self-management.

Pressures of the Present

5. The injection of money direct to the Aboriginal community as a result of Federal Government intervention in Aboriginal affairs in the early 1970's, stimulated the establishment of Aboriginal Village Councils and community organizations, advisory committees and national advisory boards. This provided the opportunity for Aborigines to move away from the usual welfare type organizations and to experiment with new areas of interest and responsibility for social development. However, there was little opportunity and few resources made available for Aborigines to acquire the skills, or the expertise, necessary for competent management of activities in these new areas of interest.

6. There are a growing number of Aboriginal communities and organizations which are assuming, or being asked to assume, greater responsibility in the definition of their own goals and future. Increasingly, Aboriginal communities want to move away from the rigid dependency status which has characterized Aboriginal Welfare administration to date. They also seek to develop new ways to meet the changing demands arising out of the expectations and promises generated by the policy of self-management.

7. Aboriginal organizations and Councils are receiving considerable amounts of money from Government and other sources. Recent reports indicate that many of these Aboriginal groups are experiencing varying degrees of difficulties in the management of their own affairs, generally because of lack of skilled and knowledgeable Aboriginal administrative officers.

8. Massive government spending on programmes designed to improve the well-being of Aborigines in Australia over the past six or seven years has been directed primarily at the elimination of disadvantage (in housing, education and health). This objective was expedient and able to show visible

"results" (number of houses, schools, etc.) in a short period of time. There was no recognition or funding for people development. However, recent government enquiries identify many areas of concern where serious human problems have arisen during the past few years. There is strong evidence of social breakdown amongst Aboriginal community groups. This applies to traditional, urban/rural situations equally, but in different ways.

9. Aborigines, both tribal and non-tribal are moving towards acceptance of the promises implied in the policy of self-management. The establishment of Councils, organizations and administrative structures by Aboriginal groups both reflects the desire to pursue and exercise self-management and, at the same time, to provide the means for accelerating the processes for its accomplishment. Aboriginal self-management requires a sense of teamwork that Aborigines must develop if they are to work together to meet the challenges which confront the community today. Historically, Aborigines have had little opportunity so far to develop a sense of common purpose. In fact, it would appear that Aboriginal and education administration in the past has been deliberately designed to fragment the Aboriginal community by creating unnecessary divisions to keep apart the various sections of the community. Previous administrations have actively pursued in practice the development of policies and programmes which actively promoted individual assimilation at the expense of group development and the growth of the community as a whole. The pattern of administrative programming in the past has been rather toward a weakening of community life and group cohesion which, as a result, has tended to break down some of the Aboriginal groups and seriously retards the development of normal community progress.

10. The change in direction from assimilation to self-management requires not only a change in policy but a significant redirection of energies, resources and commitment of agency staff towards the development of Aboriginal communities. At the same time, it requires extensive and sensitive assistance to Aborigines in order that they are able to adjust to the rapid social changes which are being imposed. Self-management without simultaneous moves to Aboriginalize key decision-making positions in the administration and delivery of services can only lead to dissatisfaction. The long-term nature of the problem and the time required to educate and train personnel makes adult education the most urgent problem in Aboriginal communities today.

11. A critical examination of the picture today leads some Aboriginal people to believe that whilst the name of the policy has been changed, the situation remains largely unchanged. Aboriginal community groups at present are almost totally dependent upon Government funding and welfare programmes and the resources and assistance provided by Government agencies. Aboriginal people are probably more dependent on Government today than they have been for many years. Whilst Aboriginal community groups have been able to expand their range of activities, they are almost totally dependent on Government funds and resources to implement these initiatives. Many Aboriginal organizations feel themselves under constant pressure trying to cope with the funding changes that are regularly imposed by bureaucracy. Some Aboriginal groups are frequently operating from crisis to crisis because of problems encountered in administration of their organizations.

12. It is not sufficiently understood that the shift in orientation of programmes to accentuate self-management requires fundamental changes in personnel and administrative style within the funding/education and welfare administration agencies. At the present time, we find there are many Aboriginal communities and organizations in need of assistance in defining their goals and the accomplishment of these objectives, being forced to rely on advisors from the same government departments and welfare agencies who have administered the assimilation policies in the past. Further, most Aboriginal organizations and Councils are forced to rely on the expertise of non-Aborigines on a part-time consulting basis or in full-time administrative positions without knowing necessarily if good management practices are being employed. Many Aboriginal Councils are having to allow consultants such as accountants to make higher management decisions for them because of their own lack of knowledge of planning, financial and budgeting processes. Yet the essence of self-help, self-sufficiency, is the right and ability to make the central decisions which define and determine the developments in the community. Aboriginal self-help is now regarded by Aborigines to be the surest road to Aboriginal social and cultural self-sufficiency lies in the development of Aboriginal initiatives and the accelerated preparation of responsible personnel who can play a decisive role in solving the problems which are currently confronting the Aboriginal community.

13. Whatever the view one has of the current Aboriginal situation, the single most important problem which we face is the critical lack of Aboriginal persons possessing the appropriate professional, technical and administrative qualifications and skills needed to combat the erosive effects of poverty experienced in our community. The rapid pace of social change confronting us daily makes this more urgent and demonstrates the inadequacies of present Government policies and programmes. This problem is compounded by the absence of competent and responsible Aboriginal personnel, through the spectrum of senior-decision-making posts in all government and non-government enterprises that, both directly and indirectly, affect the lives of Aboriginal people and their communities. As yet, the Government has not recognized that this lack of suitably qualified and experienced Aboriginal manpower is a major problem. There appears to be an underlying assumption that the work required can be carried out effectively by non-Aborigines until such time, if ever, that educational and training institutions eventually turn out enough qualified Aborigines, who after several years on the job experience will gradually move up through the ranks in the same way as Australians are promoted.

14. The policy of self-management and self-help implies a lessening of dependency of Aborigines on government welfare services and an increasing trend towards Aboriginal self-sufficiency. Reduction of dependency, however, will only be possible if there is a significant movement towards the accelerated development of Aboriginal managerial and administrative manpower. If there is to be a reduction in Aboriginal dependency on government welfare programmes, then absolute priority should be given to making available to Aboriginal community groups, all the resources and opportunities necessary for specialized training to acquire suitable managerial and administrative skills to competently manage their own community affairs.

15. Until the current shortage of trained Aboriginal personnel is eliminated, Aboriginal community groups will be troubled with two persistent problems:

(1) Aboriginal organizations and Councils will continue to experience problems of resource management.

(2) Aboriginal social development will be severely limited or restricted significantly because of the preoccupation with current administrative problems generated in part by their dependence on government and the lack of skills and the ability to plan and pursue a self-reliant life style.

If one, or both, of these problems are allowed to persist unchallenged, there is a strong possibility that the progress of Aboriginal self-development will be retarded by many years with considerable continuing associated social losses. This wastage of human and technical resources will result in real loss of confidence in Aboriginal management by the Aboriginal community and government. *More importantly, if inadequate self-management by Aborigines is allowed to persist unabated, the costs of resulting Aboriginal dependency on government resources will continue to rise dramatically.*

16. If Aboriginal community groups are to realize the promises and expectations of self-management and are to become truly self-managing and independent, there will be an increasing demand for relevant administrative and development skills. Some Aboriginal organizations have been able to employ Aboriginal staff who are capable and possess some degree of administrative skills. However, the common pattern is that these individuals (in the absence of training) have become so overloaded by the demands of the job, that they are unable to continue for any length of time under the pressure of work. Executive officers of Aboriginal organizations are facing increasing challenges in the types of activities and administrative functions they are required to undertake. In many instances, responsibilities and duties become confused, with the resulting loss of opportunities and resource wastage leading to greatly reduced levels of self-management and decison-making. The most critical management need vital to social development and self-management is the necessity for Aboriginal administrative officers of Aboriginal Councils and organizations to be both informed and knowledgeable about administration, possess the relevant skills in management practices, and the expertise for community development.

17. As Aborigines become increasingly aware of the possibilities for self-direction and development, the need for specialized Aboriginal-oriented management training becomes ever more pronounced and obvious. In the past, a number of programmes have been established at Colleges of Advanced Education and Technical Colleges, but it is believed by many Aborigines that these courses do not meet the particular management needs of Aborigines who want to be involved in activities associated with the development of greater responsibility for their own community. At present, Aborigines are free to choose any available programme of training but such a self-selection process is far too haphazard to systematically meet the distinctive group needs which exist in all Aboriginal community groups seeking to pursue their own self-management. The majority of Aboriginal community groups are located in the more remote areas of the country where tertiary training facilities are not available or if established are very limited. Those programmes that do exist are

neither designed nor structured to serve the specialized needs of Aboriginal community groups in the area. Whilst the College of Advanced Education and tertiary institutions may meet the requirements of the general population, they have not demonstrated a capacity to meet the particular needs of Aboriginal community groups wishing to be self-reliant and self-sufficient.

18. As Aboriginal councils and organizations pursue the policy of self-help and development *it is essential that their administrative officers acquire managerial and administrative skills far greater than they now possess.* Competent management of programmes by Aboriginal Councils and organizations, requires a wide range of cultural, social, technical and consultative skills on the part of Aboriginal administrative officers. Some of these can be learned or acquired on the job over a period of time. But this process is often arduous, uncertain, frustrating (to the individuals and the group) and relatively uneconomical. On-the-job experience has some advantages but will be more effective when combined with short intensive external training programmes. However, opportunities for training for those skills that are most effectively acquired through formalized instruction and supervised training experiences are often not readily available in the areas where Aboriginal groups are most concentrated.

19. Self-help requires that Aborigines develop and fully utilize their own manpower resources for the benefit of the community as a whole. This can not be achieved while administrative control of community groups is still exercised by Government officials or non-Aboriginal personnel, since self-management is dependent on the motivated effort of Aborigines themselves. Thus Aboriginal community groups need to be encouraged and assisted to work together to develop co-operative working relationships and a sense of common purpose and commitment. This describes a particular vision and perspective for Aboriginal social education and management training programmes. These programmes must be designed to provide training for skills acquisition relevant to the social and cultural demands of the new administrative roles being undertaken by Aborigines. Within this context, the need for social education and programmes for training Aborigines in development skills is now a matter of urgency, necessitating specialized training expertise and a co-operative effort with the general community.

20. It is argued that alternative Aboriginal-designed and managed training programmes are the most effective means whereby Aborigines can achieve the knowledge and skills for greater social independence and assume greater responsibility for the management of their own community affairs without losing their cultural heritage. These courses will need to be highly specialized and structured to respond to the changing needs of Aboriginal community groups. It is unlikely that these types of programmes will develop within the existing training and educational framework of Australia.

21. Alternative training programmes can provide the social education and support services to encourage and assist the Aboriginal community in the development of this sense of common purpose and co-operation. Social education and management training programmes, properly designed, can play a significant role in the development of an Aboriginal sense of common purpose: by providing opportunities for sharing learning experiences, teaching experiences, working techniques, resources and the exchange of skilled personnel.

There is now an urgent need for Aborigines to seek and promote activities which will give greater understanding of each other, define and reinforce mutual developmental goals, working relationships and a sense of common purpose.

Implications of Alternative Training for Self-Help

What are the implications of these alternative education programmes that are being set up by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people?

(1) The development of alternative Aboriginal training (and education)programmes firstly re-establishes the right, role and responsibility of Aboriginal adults to direct not only their own training but more importantly the shaping of their young people.

(2) Alternative training programmes enhance, promote and strengthen the cultural development of the community.

(3) These programmes are more likely to have a sensitivity and closeness to Aboriginal community needs.

(4) Alternative training programmes may be seen to ensure that very survival of the Aboriginal people in contrast to the conventional system which seeks consciously, or otherwise, to isolate the individual from his heritage and community.

(5) Alternative training programmes are concerned to develop educational methodologies (programmes and content) that are culturally appropriate.

(6) The programmes ensure opportunity for all Aborigines to acquire the skills, knowledge and expertise for self-help development by developing programmes that cater for those:

- who do not have the levels of literacy required by the conventional western system;
- who do not have the cultural background to cope with the methodologies used by the conventional institutions;
- who do not have interest in the prescribed content and approaches of the conventional institutions; and
- who therefore consider the conventional curriculum irrelevant to their needs.

Most importantly, alternative training programmes will be the catathat ensures that the impetus to self-help development (both personal and collective) must be the demands, pressures, support and assistance of one's peers rather than a remdial or dependency relationship with government officials, or impersonal education systems.